Comprehesive Needs Assessment

Comprehensive Needs Assessment (CNA) is a process to assist a school staff in determining their school’s strengths and areas of concern based on an analysis of data. The CNA is intended to support deeper dialogue about the data and to enable school communities to draw thoughtful conclusions about the priority concerns.  Completion of the CNA is required as a necessary step prior to the creation of the School Improvement Plan.

The process of completing the CNA enables a school to utilize five (5) major data components to create a more effective and focused school improvement plan.  The five components include the following: Student Achievement, Instructional Practices, Staff and Student Demographics, Perception, and Program data.  Schools should review various data sources and probe deeper into each source to determine root causes.

The CNA is an effective tool for schools to…

* Identify trends
* Identify strengths
* Identify priority areas of concern to be addressed in the School Improvement Plan
* Determine the basis of the school’s professional development plan
* Comply with district, state and federal requirements, i.e. NCLB and IDEA 2004, Title 1.

Data Analysis

Analyzing and understanding data allows school improvement teams to identify root causes for problems and take action to address them.  All school improvement plans should be data-drive.  An objective, effective analysis of data incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data, carefully gathered and triangulated to ensure accuracy.

Before analyzing data, consider the following norms to help guide your work.

* Describe only what you see.  Do not leap to conclusions or interpretations.  Describe just the data in front of you.  Do not try to describe what you don’t see; express what you don’t see in the form of questions (to be charted.)
* Resist the urge to work on “solutions” until you are comfortable with what the data say and don’t say.
* Surface the “lenses” and experiences you bring to the data.  Effective teams use these as strengths.
* Seek to understand differences of perception before trying to resolve them.  Early consensus can inhibit depth and breadth of analysis.
* Ask questions when you don’t understand.  Find the answers together.
* Surface assumptions and use the data to challenge them.  Look actively for both challenges AND supports to what you believe is true.

Adapted for *Essential Analysis* from Bay CES & NSRF tools and resources.

Root Causes

Gathering and analyzing data will help school improvement teams accurately frame the problems to be solved.  Once data are analyzed and the priority concerns are determined,  then it is important to explore the root causes for those areas of concern.  Far too often teams that do not spend time identifying root causes jump to the wrong conclusions as to why a problem exists, thus leading to ineffective solutions.  These solutions not only do not solve the problem, but can in fact compound it.  Use the following suggestion as a framework to guide the school improvement team in identifying root causes and effectively creating solutions for identified problems.

* From your areas of concern, select a priority concern to explore for possible root causes.
* As a group, brainstorm reasons why this concern might exist.  List these reasons as possible root causes.  When determining root causes, consider the four common places of education:  Learner/Student, Curriculum, Teacher/Instructional Practice, Classroom/ Environment.
* For each possible root cause, list in the current data that support the possible root cause.  Be sure to look at more than one data source since a concern can have more than one cause.  Also include data that you need to further substantiate your possible causes.

**Resources:**  
Data Sources for CNA - ([Word - 44k](http://myworkplace.wcpss.net/sip/documents/data-resources.doc))  
How to Avoid Common Data Pitfalls - ([Word - 16k](http://myworkplace.wcpss.net/sip/documents/how-to-avoid-common-pitfalls.docx))  
Exploring Root Causes Sample.docx - ([Word - 18k](http://myworkplace.wcpss.net/sip/documents/exploring-root-causes-sample.docx))